Moral testimony

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Moral Testimony: Once More With Feeling[1]

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1. INTRODUCTION

Picture the scene. You are on holiday and someone gives you tickets to a boxing match. En route you bump into a friend who asks your plans for the evening. You tell her that you are headed to the stadium, though you are not sure where it is. She replies: "It's on 21st street". Taking her to be reliable, you defer to her and head for 21st street. Before parting she asks what you're going to see at the stadium. You tell her that you are going to watch boxing. She replies: "It's morally wrong to watch boxing". Taking her to be reliable, you defer to her and head back to your hotel.

Whilst there is nothing amiss in the first piece of deference there seems something amiss in the second. This kind of thought marks the starting point of recent inquiry into moral testimony. This has centred around the implicitly conjunctive claim that pure moral deference, (explained shortly but, roughly, forming moral judgments *solely* on the basis of specifically moral testimony) seems problematic in a way not shared by other forms of deference.[2] The precise nature of this asymmetry vary between authors but one version is what Sarah McGrath calls 'the datum' and which I rename 'asymmetry':

ASYMMETRY: Pure moral deference seems more problematic than pure deference in many other domains.[3]

For my purposes in this paper, it is useful to distinguish such comparative claims from:

PROBLEMATIC: Pure moral deference seems problematic.

Distinguishing these two claims is useful because it opens up space for explanations of what is problematic about moral testimony which are neither restricted to the moral domain nor objections to reliance upon testimony per se.

PROBLEMATIC (and ASYMMETRY) have sometimes been thought to make trouble for moral realists in particular. Why, if moral realism is true, does moral deference seem problematic in a way that deference about other realistically-construed areas of discourse does not?[4] As McGrath puts it:

[1] Work on this paper benefitted from written comments by: Debbie Roberts, Daniel Groll, Mike Ridge, Matthew
[2] For arguments that moral deference is unproblematic see Jones (1999), Sliwa (2012). Groll & Decker (2014) argue that only some moral deference is problematic and for reasons not confined to the moral domain.
[3] Different philosophers formulate the asymmetry in different ways. Sometimes the contrast is between the moral and particular forms of empirical testimony. Very general asymmetry claims are made by Hopkins (2007: 612-13) and Howell (2014: 389).

> On the realist's view, there are moral facts, which a given individual might either know or not know. In general, these moral facts are neither trivial nor completely unknowable […] In these respects, then, the moral domain as the realist understands it seems to be one in which some individuals would count as experts relative to others. We thus might expect to find pure moral deference as straightforward a practice as deference anywhere else. The fact that we do not find this is at least initially surprising, given a realist view. In short, [PROBLEMATIC and ASYMMETRY] … cast at least some prima facie doubt on the general picture of morality that the realist presents.
>
> (McGrath 2011: 123)

In this paper I provide a new explanation of PROBLEMATIC, one that enjoys advantages over the most widely accepted explanation in the extant literature, and which is compatible with moral realism. One distinctive feature of the explanation is its applying to problematic forms of deference beyond the moral.

The main theses of the paper are (1) that many forms of normative deference beyond the moral are problematic (namely aesthetic and prudential deference) (2) that there is a common explanation of the problem with all of these forms of deference, one compatible with moral realism.

I proceed as follows. First (§2), I clarify exactly the form of moral deference at issue. I then (§3) present the most popular account of what is wrong with such deference – the Moral Understanding Explanation – before showing its shortcomings. I do this by looking at other kinds of deference which seem problematic in the same way, namely aesthetic deference and prudential deference. I then (§§4-5) give my explanation of what makes these forms of deference seem problematic. I then outline the merits of this explanation (§6), showing how it applies beyond moral deference, the plausible predictions it makes, and its ability to capture what seems plausible in other proposals.

Before moving on, let me make three preliminary points. First, I use 'giver' and 'receiver' to refer, respectively, to the person who supplies testimony and the person who defers. Second, the 'seems' in PROBLEMATIC (and ASYMMETRY) is deliberate. One live option is that of explaining why moral deference is unproblematic despite its seeming problematic. Third, PROBLEMATIC is open on what exactly is amiss when it comes to moral deference. It does not say whether it is the *judgements* formed through deference, the *agent* that forms them, or their subsequent action that is remiss. Nor does it say whether the problem with moral deference is epistemic, moral, rational, or something else.

2. THE PHENOMENON: PURE DEFERENCE, PURE RELIANCE UPON DEFERENCE

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[4] Some will think that the problem for realism comes from our lack of moral knowledge or our inability to identify moral experts. Conversely, Williams (1995: 205) can be read as objecting to ethical knowledge on the grounds that if there were such knowledge then, *per impossible*, there would be ethical experts to whom one could simply defer. Due to constraints of space my paper is directed to those not tempted to explain PROBLEMATIC via moral skepticism.

When forming moral judgements clearly some ways of relying upon testimony are unproblematic. Suppose I am considering whether it is morally wrong to eat meat. It is unproblematic for me to defer to you on issues such as the conditions under which food animals are raised, how they are killed, and the environmental effects of this. Similarly, if I am thinking about whether capital punishment is morally permissible, it is unproblematic for me to defer to you concerning issues such as the level and duration of pain inflicted by the methods of execution, its deterrent effect, and the percentage of prisoners later exonerated.

A common strategy to home in on the relevant cases is to introduce a distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' moral testimony and specify that the relevant cases, those which support PROBLEMATIC, are those of pure testimony where pureness is a matter of the content of the testimony supplied by the giver. For example, McGrath writes:

> In cases of pure moral deference, one in effect treats the person to whom one defers as having purely moral information that one lacks; in this respect, one treats the other person as a moral expert in a strong sense.
>
> (McGrath 2009: 322)

This is partly right but there are two issues here that we must carefully distinguish. One concerns the content of the testimony, another is how that testimony *produces* moral judgements. The first distinction is between impure and pure moral content:

Impure Moral Content Testimony: Testimony whose content is: (i) some morally relevant descriptive fact OR (ii) some morally relevant descriptive fact indicated as grounds for some moral fact.[5]
[Examples: 'animals raised in cages experience pain', 'capital punishment is morally wrong because it fails to deter'.]

<u>Pure</u> Moral Content Testimony: Testimony whose content is some moral fact (without specification of a ground).[6]
[Examples: 'stealing is wrong', 'charity is good', 'one morally ought to maximise utility', 'alleviating pain is more morally important than promoting pleasure'.]

In glossing pure moral testimony, I deliberately use examples only of thin ethical terms. This is because one's view of the nature of thick ethical terms will affect (a) whether one thinks we can distinguish pure

[5] Note that given the possibility of morally mistaken people giving and receiving moral testimony, these formulations are mistakenly factive in multiple ways.
[6] Groll and Decker (2014: 71) introduce a nice distinction between 'interface' and 'relevant reasons' testimony. For more on these issues and their relation to moral deference see Wiland (2014).

and impure content with testimony that deploys such terms and (b) whether one endorses PROBLEMATIC with respect to such testimony.[7] To bypass these complications I am only here concerned with testimony involving thin ethical terms.

The second relevant distinction is between two *ways* of relying upon moral testimony in forming moral judgements:

Indirect Reliance upon Moral Testimony: Agent X forms or sustains the moral judgement that P *partly* on the basis of Y's testimony that P.

Direct Reliance upon Moral Testimony: Agent X forms the moral judgement that P *solely* on the basis of Y's testimony that P.

It seems plausible that *impure* moral testimony will only be relied upon *indirectly* in forming a moral judgement. However, it is not true that pure moral testimony will only be relied upon directly. There are many ways in which one might rely indirectly upon even pure moral testimony. Here are two examples. Firstly, I might be fairly confident that capital punishment is morally wrong and rely upon your testimony simply as *corroborating* evidence for my judgement. Even though the testimony you offer is pure it does not provide the sole basis for my belief.[8] Secondly, I might use pure moral testimony as evidence concerning *nonmoral* facts. Suppose I know that we each hold the following nonmoral-to-moral conditional belief "If fish feel pain when caught or killed then eating them is wrong". Suppose also that I know that you are an expert with respect to whether creatures feel pain. If so, upon receiving your testimony "eating fish is wrong" I might use this as evidence that fish feel pain before concluding for myself that eating fish is wrong because of the pain it causes.

As mature moral thinkers we have a rich stock of nonmoral-to-moral conditional beliefs and a significant part of what makes us likely to trust someone on some moral issue is our presuming both (i) that they hold the correct relevant nonmoral-to-moral conditionals and (ii) that they reliably track the nonmoral facts.[9] This, combined with the myriad ways in which context may supply more information to the receiver, means that there will be many cases when pure moral testimony is relied upon indirectly.[10]

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[7] By thick terms I mean things such as 'cruel', 'kind', 'courageous'. For discussion see Roberts (2011) and Väyrynen (2013).

[8] Reply: "in changing one's credences in this way, one has directly relied upon moral testimony." These are interesting and complicated issues and I am unsure what to think about this. For that reason, and constraints of space, I omit reference to credences when drawing the direct / indirect distinction. Many thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to think more about this.

[9] We also have a large stock of *probable* ground beliefs such as: "if domestic air travel is impermissible it is likely because of the detrimental environmental effects."

[10] This will be especially likely where the testimonial exchange occurs between people who share some naturalistically-simple ethical theory. For example, if I know that you are a clear-headed, hedonistic utilitarian then, in my ears, your moral testimony is equivalent to testimony about net pleasure. Facetiously put: pure, direct, moral deference is possible if we ask Jonathan Dancy but not Peter Singer.

The upshot of this is that even if it is safe to assume that impure moral testimony is only relied upon indirectly in forming moral judgements, we cannot assume that pure moral testimony is *directly* relied upon. This is important because whether reliance upon moral testimony seems problematic is sensitive not solely to whether that testimony is pure but also to the *directness* of its use. My belief about the wrongness of eating fish relied upon pure moral testimony but indirectly and seemed unproblematic. Thus we must focus on cases of pure and direct moral deference.

Keeping in mind the restriction to pure, direct, cases of deference is also helpful in thinking about cases of moral deference to religious authorities. I do not deny that such deference has been historically commonplace within religious communities. However, notice how many such cases are instances of *indirect* or *impure* deference (given the background beliefs shared by the receiver of testimony and the religious authority). For example, many cases of moral deference to religious authorities take the form of a dilemma where the person knows what the relevant considerations are but seeks advice on how to weigh them up. And in the case of any religion in which commitment to theological voluntarism is widespread, there will be commitment to a particular set of biconditionals linking moral facts with states (/ attitudes / commands) of the deity, thus limiting the scope for pure, direct, moral deference.

One might object that making explicit the restriction to direct, pure, cases is unnecessary because philosophers working in this area have explicitly taken the relevant cases to be (only) those of forming moral judgements purely through reliance upon testimony – those where the agent *defers* rather than using the testimony of others as an input to their own reasoning. The problem though is that it is not so easy to delineate those cases given (i) our rich stock of nonmoral-to-moral beliefs, (ii) our plausibly taking advice only from those we think are reliable with respect to the morally-relevant non-moral facts, and (iii) contextual clues in the testimonial context. There is ample scope for testimony with pure moral content to be used indirectly.

To show that this is no idle worry, here is a case from Philip Nickel:

> Suppose my friend has asked me to loan him some money for rent, but it seems likely to me that if I loan him the money it will allow him to avoid a crisis in which he might come to terms with his addiction to heroin and alcohol. I cannot decide what to do, and I ask my mother what she thinks. According to her, I ought to tell my friend that I will loan him some money as soon as he gets his life together.
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> (Nickel 2001: 256)

Nickel's aim here is actually to motivate PROBLEMATIC. But, I suggest, it is very easy to find the receiver's deference to be unproblematic in this case. Why? Because it is so plausible that the receiver knows that their beliefs about what is morally relevant overlap with their mother's and can so easily treat the (pure) moral testimony — 'you ought not to lend him the money' — as stemming from, and evidence for, the mother's beliefs about the relevant non-moral issue (the likelihood of the friend giving up their habit if

lent the money). To test for problematic cases of moral deference we must thus ensure the beliefs are formed *solely* through deference.[11]

Taking account of the above points, here are two examples of pure, direct moral testimony - the latter borrowed from McGrath (2011: 114):

Isolated Moral Testimony: I ask how your weekend was and you tell me "my cousin did something immoral" before being interrupted. I know nothing of what your cousin is like, my knowledge of your normative ethical theory in insufficient for me to infer what your cousin did and, being interrupted, you give me no more information. Nevertheless, I judge that your cousin did something morally wrong, solely on the basis of your testimony.

Change of Mind: I possess all of the nonmoral information thought relevant to the moral permissibility of the death penalty that you possess, and I have no special reason to think that my judgment is impaired. On the basis of this information and my own careful consideration of the issue, either it seems to me that the death penalty is morally permissible, or I remain undecided. Nevertheless, I judge that the practice is not permissible, solely on the basis of your testimony.

These are cases of pure, direct, moral deference. And they seem problematic. But what is the problem?

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT'S WRONG WITH MORAL DEFERENCE

Existing explanations of PROBLEMATIC (forms of 'moral testimony pessimism') can be usefully divided using Robert Hopkins' distinction between unavailability pessimism and unusuability pessimism. As Hopkins (2007: 614) puts it, *unavailability* pessimists think that 'moral testimony does not make moral knowledge available' whilst *unusability* pessimists think that, whilst moral testimony may transfer moral knowledge, it is 'unacceptable to make use of it'. It is natural to treat the distinction as dividing those who think that the problem with moral deference is epistemic from those who think that the problem is moral.[12]

The moral understanding explanation

The most common explanation of PROBLEMATIC is a form of unusability pessimism which locates the problem with moral deference in its precluding moral understanding and the consequent inability of the receiver of such testimony to act virtuously or for their actions to have moral worth. Nickel and Hills present such explanations thus:

> [M]orality requires more of agents than that they have a correct belief concerning some moral claim. It requires agents to *understand* the moral claim…However, in many cases all that moral testimony

[11] Our rich stock of commonly-assumed beliefs plausibly explains why deference about *attributive* goodness is unproblematic. Someone in the position to receive the testimony that something is a good piano / watch / computer / car will already know not just that it has good-making features but what these features are.

[12] Hopkins himself rejects this further gloss. The moral forms of pessimism provoke questions such as the following. Is it that there is *some* reason *not* to act upon judgements formed through moral testimony (i.e. acting upon judgements formed through testimony is less than *optimal*)? Or is there decisive reason not to act upon such judgements (i.e. acting upon testimonially-formed judgements is *impermissible*)? Does the deficiency arise in all circumstances of reliance upon moral testimony or only some? Is the problem with the act or with the agent?

> provides is a correct moral belief without understanding…[t]herefore it does not provide a basis for morally good action.
>
> (Nickel 2001: 259)

> [G]iven the importance of our acquiring and using moral understanding, we have strong reasons neither to trust moral testimony nor to defer to moral experts[…] [M]oral understanding is essential to good character and to morally worthy action, that is, to right actions performed for the right reasons.[13]
>
> (Hills 2009: 98, 108)

Call this kind of explanation of PROBLEMATIC the 'moral understanding explanation'.[14]

Limits of the Moral Understanding Explanation

The moral understanding explanation is partly right. Some instances of moral deference will have the negative effects cited in the explanation and thereby be problematic.[15] However, aside from other worries we might have about it, the moral understanding explanation does not, I suggest, fully capture what seems so problematic and odd about moral deference. I think this is because the explanation does not connect with a more *meta*ethical worry about moral deference. This worry is that whilst the *psychology* of forming judgements about empirical matters directly on the basis of pure testimony seems utterly normal, there seems to be something odd or problematic about the psychology of forming a moral judgement directly on the basis of pure testimony (where this does not seem to be a worry about lacking understanding or a detrimental effect upon subsequent actions).[16]

To make this psychological worry about moral deference a little more precise, notice that pure direct moral deference seems like an extremely rare phenomenon. But even if the moral understanding explanation of PROBLEMATIC says something true about moral deference it does not plausibly account for the fact that moral deference is so rare. Presumably the explanation that the moral understanding explanation would give of the rarity of moral deference is widespread commitment to the view that moral deference undermines moral understanding and morally worthy action. But it seems implausible to attribute both (i) sufficiently widespread (albeit implicit) knowledge of this moral understanding explanation and (ii) sufficiently widespread concern to develop moral understanding and to act with moral worth.

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[13] This explanation is tentatively endorsed by McGrath (2011).

[14] Note that the moral understanding explanation has two, separable, elements. Firstly, that moral deference prevents or undermines moral understanding. Secondly, that lacking moral understanding prevents one from acting with moral worth. Someone might think the first claim suffices to explain PROBLEMATIC. To keep things simple I only consider the combination.

[15] Groll and Decker's (2014) 'normal knowledge' proposal also likely explains some problematic deference.

[16] One analogy is with wishful thinking. Clearly wishful thinking is problematic partly because of the problems generated by acting on such beliefs. But that does not fully explain what seems so odd or problematic about it. Wishful thinking that does not generate action is still problematic and I take it that part of what is problematic about it is psychological, it is problematic to be able to generate beliefs in that way.

Another kind of evidence for this residual psychological oddness is the oddness of utterances reporting instances of pure, direct, moral deference as compared with other kinds of deference. For example, compare:

(A1) 'Where's the stadium?'
(B1) 'It's on 21st street. Ruth told me.'

(A2) 'Is it wrong to watch boxing?'
(B2) 'It's wrong to watch boxing. Ruth told me.'

B1 seems like a good reply whereas the utterer of B2 would likely be interpreted either as lacking sincerity, because their utterance sounds like a joke, or as offering a particularly indirect belief attribution.[17]

Finally, if someone were to report that they held some moral view on the basis of deference then we would likely treat the judgement as half-hearted and liable to be disregarded or overturned. These features of moral deference are not plausibly explained by the moral understanding explanation.

Another limitation of the moral understanding explanation is that moral deference is not the only domain in which deference seems problematic in this way. We find the same phenomena in the aesthetic and prudential cases:

Aesthetic Deference: Solely on the basis of X's testimony that P is beautiful, Y forms the judgement that P is beautiful.

Prudential Deference: Solely on the basis of X's testimony that Φ-ing is better for Y than not Φ-ing, Y forms the judgement that Φ-ing is better for Y than not Φ-ing.

To make these cases more concrete, adapt the cases of moral deference I introduced above (*Isolated Moral Testimony*, *Change of Mind*). In the aesthetic case, these would be cases in which an agent forms the judgement that some object is beautiful via pure direct deference where either (i) the agent either knows nothing about the object, beyond the pure aesthetic testimony offered by the giver, or (ii) the agent knows the object and independently judged it not to be beautiful. Each such case seems problematic. As in the moral case, we see evidence of this in the relevant utterance:

[17] This is not to deny that there are other possible explanations. As mentioned above, one might think that the best explanation of the divergence in these cases stems from our being sanguine about *geographical* expertise but skeptical about *ethical* expertise (or, at least, our ability to reliably identify it). Furthermore, I do not deny utterances based on moral deference might have distinct problems. Perhaps, for example, B2 is problematic because one would conversationally expect a specification of the wrong-*makers*. If so, amend the example so that there is a 'how do you know?' question in between the two sentences of B2.

(B2a) 'This painting is beautiful. Ruth told me.'

There seems something odd or peculiar about someone's judging some artwork to be beautiful solely on the basis of someone's testimony in the same kind of way that it is odd to judge that watching boxing is morally wrong solely on the basis of someone's testimony.

Of course we should not assume that all problematic kinds of testimony-reliance have one explanation. But with moral, aesthetic, and prudential deference there is sufficient commonality to make it plausible that there is a common explanation and, ceteris paribus, a general explanation is better than domain-specific explanations of each. Thus we should look for an explanation of what is commonly problematic to deference in each of these domains.[18]

Despite its highlighting *something* problematic about reliance upon moral testimony, the moral understanding explanation is not the full story of what is problematic about reliance on testimony in the aesthetic or the prudential case.[19] Moral worth is not at stake when one forms aesthetic or prudential judgements or acts upon them.

Attempts to broaden the moral understanding explanation

A likely response is that in the aesthetic and prudential domains there are values analogous to moral worth at stake and we should take the moral understanding explanation to be an instance of a more general form of explanation. That is, we might generalise from:

Moral Understanding Explanation: Moral deference is problematic because it undermines the receiver's moral understanding and ability to act with moral worth.

To:

Generalised Understanding Explanation: These forms of deference are problematic because they undermine the receiver's moral/prudential/aesthetic understanding and ability to act with moral/prudential/aesthetic worth.

This is an interesting proposal, one which deserves a full assessment. However due to constraint of space let me mention two doubts about it, one for each of prudential and aesthetic judgements.

First, nothing in the prudential case plays the role that moral worth plays in the moral case. Either there is no such thing as prudential worth or, if there is, it does not seem important in the way that moral worth is, and not important enough to explain why prudential deference seems problematic.

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[18] It is difficult to avoid writing as if there is only *one* problem with moral deference. I do not mean to suggest this.
[19] When it is problematic, a qualifier omitted henceforth.

Second, in the aesthetic case, whilst it is plausible that reliance on aesthetic deference undermines the skill that an artist exhibits, or the amount of credit that they deserve in producing an artwork, there seems to be something problematic about aesthetic deference even when this is utterly unconnected to aesthetic creation. If I form the judgement that some artwork is beautiful *solely* on the basis of your testimony that seems problematic even if I have plan to produce no artworks myself. Further, even if an 'aesthetic understanding' account partly explains why someone ought not to engage in aesthetic deference — because it hinders or precludes development of their aesthetic understanding — this does not explain the apparent *oddness* of the state of mind of deferring in one's aesthetic judgement. To use Hopkins' terms, an aesthetic understanding account provides an *unusability* pessimism when what we want is closer to an *unavailability* pessimism, a worry which might be expressed by saying that if your judgement is based on pure, direct, deference then you do not *really* judge the artwork to be beautiful or you only do so half-heartedly.

To recap, my aim in this section was to cast doubt on the claim that the moral understanding explanation fully explains PROBLEMATIC. So far I have argued that moral, aesthetic, and prudential deference all appear problematic in the same way and that the moral understanding explanation (and its analogues) are not the *full* explanation of this common problem. The objection considered above targeted the second claim, arguing that the moral understanding explanation can extend to the aesthetic and prudential domains. I now turn to objections that target the first claim (that there is a problem common to moral, aesthetic and prudential deference).[20]

Against the commonality claim

Not all problematic kinds of deference have one explanation. Some domains have deference problems traceable to parochial features. As McGrath (2011: 121) points out, deferring about one's own mental states is largely problematic and for parochial reasons, namely the privileged access one has to one's own mental life. On this note one might object to my claim that there is a problem common to moral, aesthetic and prudential deference by giving a parochial explanation of what is wrong with aesthetic testimony:

Objection One: the problem with *aesthetic* testimony is specifically the difficulty (impossibility?) of forming a judgement about an artwork without *acquaintance* with it.

Notice, first, that this only applies to the aesthetic analogue of *Isolated Moral Testimony*. It says nothing about the oddness of aesthetic deference in cases like *Change of Mind*, when one *is* familiar with the object of evaluation. This is a significant downside of the explanation because aesthetic deference where one *is* acquainted with the object seems at least equally problematic.

[20] Due to constraints of space I am considering here only two possible objections from a large set. And each objection could be made for each of aesthetic and prudential deference. One objection from the larger set that I do not consider is that aesthetic and/or prudential deference is problematic precisely because it is a form of deference about one's own mental states.

Second, acquaintance does not plausibly distinguish aesthetic deference. In all three domains there seems to be some acquaintance requirement on judgement. Just as it is difficult (impossible? irrational?) for you to judge that some painting is beautiful if wholly unacquainted with it, if you do not know what Φ-ing *is* it is difficult (impossible? irrational?) for you to judge that Φ-ing is wrong or imprudent. What the relevant acquaintance requirement(s) are is a thorny issue but all that is needed for my purposes is that there is an acquaintance requirement on prudential and moral judgements just as with aesthetic judgement. And plausibly there is.[21]

Another way to challenge my suggestion of a common problem with moral, aesthetic and prudential deference is to claim that one of the latter two is unproblematic. Here is an instance of such an objection:

Objection Two: prudential testimony is *unproblematic*. Deferring to one's doctor is a paradigm case of unproblematic prudential deference.

This objection rests on a mistake reflecting the fact that much prudential advice is *instrumental* and non-normative and so analogous to *impure* moral testimony. Most prudential advice is impure because in the kinds of contexts in which we give prudential advice we typically presuppose some view of the prudential good of the person and attempt to identify (productive and constitutive) means to it. For example, I might defer to you as to which of two types of holiday I should go on, whether a conference is worth attending, whether I should join a gym. In each case there is an (albeit imprecise) assumption of what kinds of things promote welfare and an attempt to determine which option does so maximally.[22]

To test the purported disanalogy between moral and prudential deference, the relevant question is whether we can rely on others regarding *fundamental* prudential questions, those *not* about the means of promoting presupposed prudential goods. And in these cases deference seems problematic. For example, suppose I defer to my doctor not about how to become healthier but as to whether I would be better off sacrificing athletic achievement for some increased degree of health.[23] Or suppose I defer to you and accept that knowledge is not prudentially valuable for its own sake. Both of these cases of deference about fundamental prudential questions seem puzzling and problematic.

Objection two draws our attention to the fact that much prudential testimony is non-normative, taking the form of specifying means to presupposed ends. This does not mean that we should reject the claim that there is a parallel deference problem across aesthetics, morality, and prudence, only that we must specify cases carefully to see that parallel.

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[21] For discussion of the acquaintance principle see Kant (1790), McKeever & Ridge (2011), Ninan (2014), Wollheim (1980).
[22] In Gibbard's (1992: 175) terms, this kind of testimony is 'contextual'.
[23] For discussion of this issue see Groll (2011).

Normative Deference?

In my reply to objection two, I claimed that prudential deference is unproblematic when *non-normative* in character. A natural suggestion is that aesthetic, moral and prudential deference are problematic because deference is problematic in any *normative* domain.[24] This explanation has the virtue of being sufficiently general to cover the moral, aesthetic and prudential domains.

One problem for this suggestion is the instances of deference in domains that are plausibly normative but which present no analogous problem.[25] For example:

Meaning Deference: Solely on the basis of X's testimony that 'soñoliento' means sleepy, Y forms the judgement that 'soñoliento' means sleepy.

Epistemic Deference: Solely on the basis of X's testimony that A knows that P, Y forms the judgement that A knows that P.

These kinds of deference clearly do not generate analogous issues. It is unproblematic to believe that a word has a particular meaning, or that someone knows some fact (or knows some person) simply by deferring.[26] For instance, notice how unproblematic these utterances are:

(B3) ''Soñoliento' means sleepy. Ruth told me.'
(B4) 'Hilary knows David / chess / a lot about economics. Ruth told me.'

This suggests we must distinguish problematic from unproblematic deference *within* the realm of the normative rather than taking normative deference to be problematic per se.

It is, of course, controversial whether meaning and epistemic discourse are normative.[27] It would take me too far afield to address that issue so let me put my interim conclusion disjunctively. Either: (C1) meaning and epistemic discourse are non-normative, in which case the problem with moral/aesthetic/prudential deference (etc) might be explained by normative deference being problematic generally OR (C2) the problematic cases of deference that I am considering here are only a subclass of the normative. Here is how this affects the rest of the paper. If (C1) is true, the view proposed later in the paper is an attempt to explain why *normative* deference is problematic. If (C2) is true, the view proposed later in the paper reveals which forms of normative deference are problematic and why.

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[24] C.f. Howell (2014: 410) 'This is still a normative domain and…there seems to be something fishy about deferring in any such domain.'

[25] Preferred terminologies differ here. I use 'normative' where others use 'robustly normative'. As I carve things up etiquette and the rules of clubs etc are non-normative (as opposed to normative but non-robustly so). For discussion see Copp (2007: chapter 8), Enoch (2007), McPherson (2011).

[26] There will be other cases where epistemic deference is problematic, such as where one defers on some issue that one knows oneself to have excellent evidence for (e.g. 'I have a hand. Ruth told me.'). See Groll & Decker (2014:65).

[27] Or, using alternate terms, whether they are *robustly* normative, non-robustly normative, or non-normative. See note 25 above.

4. NON-COGNITIVISM AND DEFERENCE

I have suggested that the psychology of moral deference seems problematic in a way not fully addressed by the moral understanding explanation and that similar issues arise for aesthetic and prudential deference. In each case we are inclined to think that someone who defers does not really hold the judgement that they profess to hold or that the judgement is in some way half-hearted. In this section and the next (§5) I will focus on the moral case in particular in order to develop my explanation of PROBLEMATIC for moral deference. I will then show (§6) how this explanation extends to the aesthetic and prudential domains.

When it comes to *meta*ethical explanations of PROBLEMATIC, the most common suggestion is that PROBLEMATIC would be well explained by the truth of non-cognitivism (the view that moral judgements are desire-like states, states not capable of being true or false).[28] Exactly *how* non-cognitivism would explain PROBLEMATIC is not always made explicit but Hopkins suggests an explanation:

> Testimony is a means for learning from others, for coming to know what they know…But there is no moral knowledge to hand on. Morality is at best a matter of opinion, and at worst a matter of feeling. If the latter, moral 'claims' are not even the sorts of thing which can be true or false, but expressions of sentiment, perhaps of approval and disapproval…On other view nothing like moral knowledge can be attained. No wonder, then, that testimony cannot transmit such knowledge. Indeed, if testimony requires knowledge to transmit, there cannot even be testimony about moral matters.
>
> (Hopkins 2007:615)

This is a form of *unavailability* pessimism running thus: If non-cognitivism is true then there is no moral *knowledge,* so transmission of moral knowledge via moral testimony is impossible, and this explains PROBLEMATIC. Call this explanation 'no-knowledge'.

One downside to *no-knowledge* is that it is only applicable to non-cognitivist views that deny that there is moral knowledge. But this is a significant cost to the strategy and such denial is far from the norm among contemporary non-cognitivists.[29]

Whatever the merits of *no-knowledge*, I think a better explanation of PROBLEMATIC is available to a non-cognitivist, one that does not involve denying moral knowledge as one of its elements.[30] This other explanation stems from a tension between moral deference, non-cognitivism, and a thesis about the formation of moral sentiments:

SENTIMENTS DEFERENCE DENIAL (SDD): It is impossible to form desire-like moral sentiments (states such as e.g. anger, blame, guilt and resentment) on the basis of pure, direct, testimony.

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[28] McGrath (2011: 116-7; 2009: 321-2). Similarly, Coady (1992: 69) and Sliwa (2012: 176, n7). Each of McGrath, Coady, Sliwa does not say *exactly* how the non-cognitivist view explains PROBLEMATIC but I think they have in mind the no-knowledge explanation.

[29] Blackburn (2000: 307, 318). For discussion see Gibbard (2003: §4).

[30] The non-cognitivist is free to embrace the moral understanding explanation or some other first-order explanation. Thanks to Jack Woods for discussion here.

Applying this to the case of moral testimony (bearing in mind the restriction to cases of pure, direct, deference) the non-cognitivist can argue that the problem with moral deference stems from our inability to form moral sentiments – which, by their lights, moral judgements *are* – by pure direct deference.[31] This yields a strong form of unavailability pessimism about moral deference — that pure, direct, moral deference is impossible – not because moral knowledge in particular cannot be transmitted through testimony but because moral *judgements* cannot be formed on the basis of pure, direct, deference.

The view that PROBLEMATIC is true because moral deference is *impossible* (which is explained, in turn, by the truth of SDD), is only one strategy that a non-cognitivist could take. It is open to them to accept some weaker claim than SDD and still thereby explain PROBLEMATIC.[32] Rather than accept SDD and hold that it is *impossible* to form moral sentiments via deference, a non-cognitivist could instead hold the following weaker thesis:

SDD* : Moral sentiments are at least difficult to form on the basis of pure, direct, testimony.

Why think SDD* (or SDD) is true? Given the assumption that, as desire-like attitudes, moral sentiments cannot be true or false, it seems that the strongest incentives that can be offered to someone to adopt some sentiment concern either the *desirability* of having it or its *appropriateness* (or fittingness or correctness). On the first possibility, even utterly trustworthy reports of the *desirability* of some desire-like attitude are not something that agents can use to form and revise desire-like attitudes.[33] Even if it would avert some terrible disaster or get you tenure, you cannot feel anger or resentment towards arbitrary objects or persons at will. And moving to cases of deference concerning the appropriateness of an attitude, if you tell me only that I ought to love a particular person or that shame / anger / resentment towards someone is appropriate, I cannot form these attitudes on the basis of your say-so. (Remembering again the restriction to cases of pure, direct, deference).[34]

Assuming that SDD* is true, why is it true? What explains it? Moral sentiments have at least three features that plausibly explain the difficulty of forming such attitudes directly through pure direct deference. First, moral sentiments are responses to apparent properties of their object and so require some apparent awareness of its features.[35] One feels anger or resentment at a person in virtue of something (e.g.) their not doing their share of the work and towards their action in virtue of the costs it imposes on others

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[31] Caveat: Not all non-cognitivists think of moral judgements as moral *sentiments*. It is unclear (to me) whether there are forms of non-cognitivism for which an analogue of SDD (or SDD*, below) is false.

[32] This is not quite right for they are not explaining why pure moral deference is problematic. After all, this explanation implies that pure moral deference is *impossible*. For simplicity, rather than formulate a more neutral version of PROBLEMATIC "Instances of *apparent* pure moral deference…" I stick with PROBLEMATIC as formulated above. Many thanks to Sarah Stroud here.

[33] Kavka (1983).

[34] Note, I am not claiming that e.g. desirability reports never *cause* people to form these attitudes. That would be too strong. My claim is that one cannot rationally form the attitudes solely on these grounds.

[35] "Apparent" because clearly one can form these attitudes towards non-existents.

and the attitudes it manifests. Second, moral sentiments are experienced as presumptively authoritative. We take them to be merited by their objects, absent evidence to the contrary. When one feels disgust towards someone on account of their discriminatory behaviour one experiences this response as *called for* by features of them or their action and one takes this as evidence that the action is wrong. Third, our ability to rationally influence our moral sentiments is limited, especially by comparison with beliefs. Our moral sentiments typically change in virtue of changes in (i) our beliefs about the object of those sentiments or (ii) our beliefs about ourselves or, more generally, the origin of the sentiments. For example, we cease to feel anger that seemed merited when we learn that someone was acting in self-defence or we reflect and realize that our mood distorted our understanding of what someone meant or what they did. Thus our moral sentiments can change in response to our beliefs particularly our beliefs about the object of those sentiments. But this is imperfect, as seen in the common phenomenon of recalcitrant guilt, blame, or resentment. There is also the way in which our sentiments constrain our ability to change our moral views, such as in the common phenomenon of being reluctant or unable to form moral beliefs when such beliefs clash with our affective states (such as the belief that one morally ought to redistribute much more of one's disposable income).

To see how SDD* results in a non-cognitivist explanation of PROBLEMATIC, take the two cases of pure, direct, deference I described above, *Isolated Moral Testimony* and *Change of Mind*. In *Isolated Moral Testimony* it is the first feature of moral sentiments that is relevant. The receiver is told that someone performed some wrong action but given no further details. Plausibly, in such a case, unless the receiver enriches the content of the testimony somehow, they will have insufficient information to form moral sentiments towards the agent or their action. The receiver might be in a position to know that the relevant agent has done something which they would feel anger, resentment, blame, or some other sentiment in response to, but they will not thereby form such an attitude. They will thus be unable to form the moral sentiments constituting the moral judgement.

In *Change of Mind* it is the second and third features of moral sentiments that are relevant. In the case as described, someone defers and thereby changes their mind from judging that capital punishment is permissible to judging that it is impermissible. In such a case it is extremely difficult to imagine the agent undergoing such a radical change in their moral sentiments simply on the basis of giver's testimony. Their previous sentiments seemed warranted by features of their object, they acquire no independent evidence that their judgement is impaired or their sentiments mistaken (they do not learn, for example, that their sentiments are being manipulated by a third party), and because this is a case of pure testimony they do not change their view about the nature of capital punishment (its deterrent effect, or whatever). Further, even if the agent did become convinced otherwise, it is easy to imagine their previous sentiments persisting, thereby making the moral judgement formed through deference difficult to sustain.

Here is an analogy: suppose you find some particular food disgusting. Even some expert food critic telling you that the food is in fact delicious is extremely unlikely, by itself, to extinguish the disgust response that you have to the food. You cannot rationally revise your disgust response in that way. And

this likely remains the case even if you rid yourself of the view that your response is warranted. Similarly, it is difficult to feel anger or resentment about capital punishment simply on the basis that someone (even someone you trust) tells you that such responses are correct.

I suggest that *non-cognitivists* who wish to explain PROBLEMATIC without denying that there is moral knowledge might try instead to explain PROBLEMATIC in terms of the difficulty of forming moral sentiments through deference (SDD*).

Though non-cognitivism can provide an explanation of PROBLEMATIC via SDD* that is reasonably straightforward, it is not the only metaethical view that can use SDD* to explain PROBLEMATIC. Suitably modified, this explanation can also be given by other metaethical views. I show how this is so in the next section.

5. SENTIMENTALISM, DEFERENCE, AND MORAL REALISM

Sentimentalism

In the previous section, I argued that PROBLEMATIC could be explained by the combination of non-cognitivism and SDD* and I gave some reasons for thinking that SDD* is true. However, SDD*'s relevance to PROBLEMATIC is not something that can only be used by the non-cognitivist to explain the phenomenon. A number of metaethical views can use SDD* to explain PROBLEMATIC. This is because even though the views differ on exactly *how* moral sentiments are connected to moral judgements, they give sufficient role to moral sentiments for SDD* to be capable of explaining PROBLEMATIC.

The precise class of views that can use SDD* to explain PROBLEMATIC is an interesting question, one I do not hope to settle here. But clear candidates are views which make moral sentiments either wholly or partly constitutive of moral judgements.

The non-cognitivist explanation of PROBLEMATIC I gave above can be straightforwardly adopted by hybrid theories of moral judgements, theories that take moral judgements to be *combinations* of beliefs and desire-like moral sentiments.[36] Moral deference, on a hybrid view of moral judgement, requires coming to be in a combination of states (one belief-like and one desire-like) but only the former can easily be formed or modified through direct pure moral deference.

This will be true of hybrid theories that take the moral judgement to be partly constituted by a desire-like state as well as forms of *de dicto* internalist cognitivism, of the sort outlined by Tresan,[37] which hold that, necessarily, moral judgements (though beliefs) are accompanied by desire-like states. More generally, any *hybrid* view of moral judgement that takes moral judgements, or the making of a moral judgement, to consist of combinations of belief-like and moral sentiments can explain PROBLEMATIC on the grounds that it is, at least, very difficult to form the necessary moral sentiments for moral judgement through moral deference.

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[36] For discussion of such theories see for example: Ridge (2014), Schroeder (2013), Toppinen (2013).
[37] Tresan (2006). Note I am not faithful to the details of Tresan's form of de dicto internalist cognitivism.

Moral Realism

So far I have shown how two kinds of metaethical view — non-cognitivism and hybrid metaethical views — can explain PROBLEMATIC via the truth of SDD*. But, as mentioned earlier, moral deference is sometimes thought to present a problem for *moral realism* in particular. In the rest of this section I want to show how even some forms of moral realism can explain PROBLEMATIC using SDD*.

How could a moral realist view explain PROBLEMATIC via appeal to SDD*? Suppose that moral judgements are wholly constituted by beliefs but that those beliefs are about the *fittingness* of moral sentiments.[38] For example, to judge that X acted wrongly in Φ-ing is to believe that it is fitting (e.g.) to resent X for Φ-ing. Such a view can be a form of moral realism. It holds that moral judgements are beliefs (beliefs about fitting sentiments), that there are moral facts (facts about fitting sentiments), that such facts do not themselves depend upon agents' sentiments, and it is compatible with the idea that we have moral knowledge. Call such a view 'realist-sentimentalism'.[39]

On a realist-sentimentalist view of moral judgements, there will be a pressure for one's sentiments to match up with one's moral beliefs. For example, if one believes some action to be wrong but lacks the relevant moral sentiments then one lacks an attitude that one takes to be fitting. One believes (for example) that it is fitting to feel resentment but does not feel resentment. This is at least a form of discord, at most a kind of irrational incoherence.[40] There will be a pressure to resolve this clash one way or another, through a change in either belief or in resentment.

With this sentimental realist view on the table, let us see how it plays out with moral deference by applying it to the two test cases of pure, direct, moral deference, *Isolated Moral Testimony* and *Change of Mind*.

In *Isolated Moral Testimony* the receiver is told that someone performed some wrong action but given no further details. In such a case, unless the receiver enriches the content of the testimony, they will have insufficient information to form the appropriate sentiments towards the agent or their action. This is because moral sentiments are responses that we have to the properties of the relevant action or agent (etc). Without proper acquaintance with them the attitudes are very unlikely to arise even if we know that they would, were we so acquainted. Here is how this bears on PROBLEMATIC: in cases of such deference the problem stems from the receiver coming to form the judgement that negative moral sentiments are fitting whilst likely lacking such attitudes.

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[38] An alternative strategy is to hold that moral judgements *commit* judgers to such attitudes although these attitudes are not part of the content of the belief. Perhaps a form of moral realism which adopts this commitment can use SDD* to explain PROBLEMATIC.

[39] It is not always obvious whether a form of moral realism falls inside this realist-sentimentalist category. It would be a mistake to think that holders of buck-passing theories of value are *ipso facto* judgement sentimentalists. This is a mistake because buck-passers are typically doing moral metaphysics, not making claims about judgements about value. However, it is clear that realist sentimentalism is denied by: Brink (1989), Bloomfield (2001), Cuneo (2001), Enoch (2011), Foot (2000), Moore (1903), Railton (1986), Zangwill (2003).

[40] I hope it is already clear that I do not claim that moral deference is the *only* way in which one can end up with a problematic disconnect between one's moral beliefs and one's moral sentiments. The same problem occurs for agents who, themselves, form moral beliefs but whose conflicting moral sentiments are recalcitrant, such as the person who convinces themselves that meat-eating is wrong but cannot blame those who do so.

To be clear, the issue is not necessarily that receiver will be unable to form the *belief*. Rather, the receiver will lack the desire-like moral sentiment mentioned in the content of the belief, given their lack of acquaintance with the act / agent. Here is a parallel. Suppose one is told (simply) that Colin is admirable. One may well form the belief that Colin is admirable through pure deference. Perhaps one now knows that Colin is admirable. But one will not feel *admiration* on this basis. Why not? Because such attitudes are responses to the base properties of the object of admiration and one does not know what Colin merits admiration *in virtue of*. In the case of *Isolated Moral Testimony* one has less information than in the admirability case. One knows that *some* moral sentiments are fitting but has no further information and so will not know which sentiments are fitting.

In *Change of Mind*, receiver defers and goes from judging that capital punishment is permissible to judging it impermissible. Applying the kind of realist view described above, such a case involves the receiver's going *from* believing that it is not fitting to e.g. blame agents who enact the death penalty (or being undecided) *to* believing that it is fitting to blame agents who enact the death penalty. The oddness in such deference stems from the likely discord between their beliefs and their moral sentiments, given SDD*. For the reasons given above, there is typically harmony between one's moral beliefs and one's moral sentiments and one's moral sentiments are taken to be authoritative absent evidence to the contrary. Assuming harmony between the receiver's beliefs and moral sentiments *before* the testimony is offered then, given their prior belief that capital punishment was permissible (or being undecided) they likely did not (e.g.) blame capital punishers. If SDD* is true, they likely cannot come to feel blame purely through deference. Doing so requires them to change their moral sentiments entirely, in line with the belief, without being given any independent *grounds* for such sentiments. Even granting that one can come to believe through deference that anger is correct, one likely thereby forms a belief that *clashes* with one's moral sentiments, in that one (now) believes that it is correct to have a reaction that one currently does not have and cannot form simply through deference. It is hard to imagine someone being able to extinguish such responses simply on the basis of moral deference.

To give an analogy, suppose a person is moved by some piece of art, finding it to be sublime and moving and so judges it to be beautiful. An expert critic (one whose expertise they recognise) then tells them that the work is ugly and flawed. Even if they come to *believe* that the work is ugly and flawed, it still seems unlikely that this will extinguish the affective responses that they had to the artwork (or, furthermore, to bring about contrary responses). Thus someone who defers will likely be left with a clash between their beliefs and their affective responses. My suggestion is that the same holds for the moral case. Moral testimony might prompt one to look again and change one's mind and one's moral sentiments, but by itself pure direct moral deference is comparatively powerless to change the moral sentiments. Even if one can form new moral beliefs on the basis of pure direct deference one cannot form the requisite sentiments on that basis.

This seems a plausible way for a realist-sentimentalist to explain PROBLEMATIC. It explains what is odd about pure, direct, moral deference not in terms of its inability to produce moral *beliefs* but, rather, its

inability to produce the sentiments that moral beliefs are beliefs *about* the correctness of. In short, the oddness of someone's claiming to hold some moral view on the basis of deference that Φ-ing is wrong is explained by (i) such judgements being beliefs about the correctness of moral sentiments coupled with (ii) the inability of testimony to produce corresponding sentiments (because of SDD*).

In this section I have shown how SDD* can be used by hybrid theorists and by some moral realists (realist-sentimentalists) to explain PROBLEMATIC. Whilst the debate about moral deference has mainly tried to locate the problem with moral deference either on the *epistemic* side, in the problem of obtaining *knowledge* through deference, or on the *moral* side, in the problem of acting upon judgements formed through deference, something that had been overlooked was the odd *psychology* of forming moral judgements through deference. SDD* helps to explain why moral deference seems problematic. It seems problematic either because one likely cannot form moral judgements through deference or because, even if one can do so, forming moral judgements in that way is likely to lead to a clash or discord between one's moral judgements and one's moral sentiments.

In the next section I apply these claims from the moral domain to the other domains where deference is problematic in the same way.

6. OTHER PROBLEMATIC FORMS OF DEFERENCE

In the previous sections I argued that SDD*:

SDD*: Moral sentiments are at least difficult to form on the basis of pure, direct, testimony.

can be used to explain PROBLEMATIC and that this kind of explanation is not restricted to non-cognitivism but can be offered by hybrid theories and (with some alterations) by forms of moral realism. I want now to generalise from the moral case to the other problematic kinds of deference and outline the merits of the kind of explanation I have offered. For the sake of brevity, rather than run through all three kinds of view — non-cognitivist, hybrid, cognitivist — I will explicitly give only the *cognitivist* version though it should be clear how analogous arguments can be given for the other types.[41]

The kind of explanation I have offered is familiar in the aesthetic case from Kant who famously denies the possibility of aesthetic deference:

> If someone does not find a building, a view, or a poem beautiful, then, *first*, he will refuse to let even a hundred voices, all praising it highly, prod him into approving of it inwardly. He may of course act as if he liked it too, so that people will not think that he lacks taste…yet the fact that others have liked something can never serve him as a basis for an aesthetic judgement.
>
> (Kant [1790] §33)

[41] By not taking moral judgements to be even partly constituted *by* desire-like attitudes, the task is most difficult for the cognitivist. Thus by focusing on their explanation I am choosing the most difficult case.

Kant's pessimism about aesthetic deference stems from an aesthetic analogue of SDD* (or, perhaps, SDD) given his view of aesthetic judgement, particularly his claim that the *only* ground for aesthetic judgement is a particular kind of *pleasure* in the object and his view that such a pleasure response cannot be formed through deference (our inward approval is *impervious* to being prodded by the views of others). And this captures the problem with aesthetic deference that is analogous to the moral case, namely the truth of an aesthetic counterpart of SDD*:

SDD*.a: Aesthetic sentiments are at least difficult to form on the basis of pure, direct, testimony.

If you know nothing about some artwork beyond being told that it is beautiful then you will not have aesthetic sentiments with respect to it. And where you are familiar with the work and it leaves you cold, even if some trustworthy critics praise it and you defer to them and *believe* it to be beautiful you cannot come to feel pleasure in it *simply* on the basis of their testimony. If one accepts the critic's view, and forms the belief, one will likely be left with a clash between one's response and the attitude one deems the artwork to merit on account of its beauty.[42] The critic's testimony might prompt one to look again and see it in a different light. But that is not simply deferring.

Move now to the prudential case. Prudential judgements are plausibly judgements of the correctness of valuing in some way. If that is right then prudential deference will seem problematic for the same reasons as aesthetic and moral deference. It is difficult, if not impossible, to value something with which you are unfamiliar simply on the basis that you have been told to (even by someone you trust). And, in the case where you are familiar with what you are being told to value, if your values and concerns are not that way to start with then, given SDD*, you will not be able to simply defer to the other person without generating a clash between your judgements about which you should care about more and the cares that you yourself have.

What unites the problematic cases of deference — including reliance upon aesthetic, moral and prudential testimony — is that the relevant judgements are all closely connected to affective responses which we cannot form, or cannot form easily, on the basis of pure direct deference.

I have argued that there is a problem with moral deference relevantly similar to one which afflicts aesthetic and prudential deference, a problem stemming from the difficulty of acquiring moral sentiments (and their analogue) through deference and the problem that this poses for agents forming moral, aesthetic and prudential judgements. I will now detail the virtues of this explanation.

First, it applies widely, covering moral, aesthetic and prudential judgements and explaining the version of PROBLEMATIC that arises in each. By contrast, this common issue with moral, aesthetic, prudential deference is not something that the moral understanding explanation can plausibly cover.

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[42] Whiting (2015) argues that aesthetic deference is epistemically problematic because of its inability to rationalize certain kinds of aesthetic response.

Second, my explanation nicely sorts problematic from unproblematic cases by having the resources to explain why deference about some *normative* judgements generates this problem whilst others do not. Deference with respect to moral, aesthetic and prudential judgements is problematic because of the connection between the respective judgement types and affective responses. By contrast epistemic deference and meaning deference do not have the problem because such judgements are not closely connected to judgements of the correctness of some *affective* response.[43]

Third, the explanation I have offered generates a test for other kinds of problematic kinds of deference. It predicts, correctly, that deference about the *desirable*, the *loveable*, the *sexy*, the *revolting*, the *disgusting*, and the *shameful*, will all generate analogous problems. And this seems right. Deference about each of these kinds of judgement seems odd because pure, direct, deference is so unlikely to produce shame, disgust, revulsion, lust, love and desire. Similarly, the view predicts that evaluative deference will be problematic, given the difficulty of acquiring or changing one's valuing responses in response to pure evaluative testimony.

A fourth merit of the explanation is that it is compatible with a range of metaethical views (and for meta-aesthetic views and the like) but not all. It is thus discriminating without being partisan. A number of metaethical views can point to the difficulty of acquiring or overruling affective states on the basis of deference to explain PROBLEMATIC. It also shows which forms of moral realism will have most trouble explaining this phenomenon, namely those that take moral judgements to be unconnected to moral sentiments.

I will now compare the kind of explanation I have offered with two others to show how it captures what has seemed plausible about each of them whilst avoiding problems for each.

In the literature on moral deference, another candidate explanation of PROBLEMATIC is one proposed by Robert Hopkins under the name of 'the requirement':

The requirement: Having the right to a moral belief requires one to grasp the moral grounds for it.

Hopkins suggests that, when it comes to moral testimony, the pessimists' best strategy is to argue that moral judgement is subject to the requirement and take this to explain PROBLEMATIC on account of moral testimony not supplying the moral grounds for the belief (in the pure, direct, case).[44] One worry about taking the requirement to explain PROBLEMATIC is its lack of explanatory depth. The claim that moral judgement is governed by the requirement seems too close to the phenomenon to be explained, namely that moral deference seems problematic.[45] More importantly, we are left with the question of *why* moral judgement is subject to this requirement.

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[43] Those who incline towards a non-cognitivist account of epistemic discourse or meaning discourse may want to argue that pure direct deference is actually problematic in these domains and for SDD-related reasons. For discussion of non-cognitivism in these areas see Chrisman (2007), Gibbard (2012), Ridge (2007).

[44] Furthermore, Hopkins endorses the analogue of the requirement in the aesthetic domain.

[45] A worry that Hopkins (2007: 631) acknowledges and tries to alleviate.

Moving to aesthetic deference, many have thought that the problem with reliance upon aesthetic testimony can be explained by aesthetic judgement being governed by an 'acquaintance principle'. Hopkins provides a formulation of the principle thus:

The acquaintance principle: Having the right to an aesthetic belief requires one to have experienced for oneself the object it concerns.[46]

This is usually interpreted as an *epistemic* principle. Hopkins treats the standard acquaintance principle as the following conditional: If an aesthetic belief is to count as knowledge, one must have experienced for oneself the object it concerns. Two unanswered questions plague this principle. First, *why* is such testimonial knowledge transfer impossible in the aesthetic domain? Second, what *degree* of acquaintance is required? If the requirement is set high then it, implausibly, rules out lots of apparent aesthetic knowledge. If the requirement is set low then the justification for the restriction becomes unclear. Why is loose acquaintance *so* much better than (potentially well-informed) non-acquaintance?

The explanation that I have provided of the common problem with moral, aesthetic, and prudential deference has the virtue of explaining the attraction of these principles whilst avoiding their problems. If moral, aesthetic, and prudential judgements all have a close connection to affective responses and the formation of such responses requires some impression of the base properties of their object, this makes clear why the requirement and the acquaintance principle seem plausible. The person judging an artwork without acquaintance typically lacks knowledge of the aesthetic grounds of the judgement and is therefore in the analogous situation to the judger in *Isolated Moral Judgement*. Both agents may be able to form the requisite belief (that the person did something wrong / that the object is beautiful) but without further knowledge of the action or the artwork, neither will likely have the relevant affective responses. Affectively speaking, they will be left hanging.

This makes clear why there is *something* to the requirement, and the acquaintance principle, but without elevating them to genuine epistemic requirements. It enables us to say that in *Isolated Moral Judgement* one can know that someone did something wrong (in the aesthetic case, that some artwork is beautiful) whilst still preserving the sense that there is *something* odd or problematic about judgements formed in that way. Furthermore, treating the acquaintance principle in this fashion also helps to answer the question of what *degree* of acquaintance is required – it is whatever degree enables judgers to form the requisite affective responses.

One further advantage of my account is that, unlike the acquaintance principle, it explains why aesthetic deference is problematic when one *is* acquainted with the object of evaluation. The typical case discussed in connection with the acquaintance principle is one where the receiver is unfamiliar with the object of evaluation, a focus that makes the acquaintance principle seem promising. But that principle says *nothing* about the oddness of deference by those familiar with the object of evaluation. If one is stood in

[46] See also Wollheim (1980: 233).

front of a painting and left completely cold by it then it is odd for one to accept testimony that it is beautiful (even from a reliable critic). The account I have given explains this. The acquaintance principle does not.

7. CONCLUSION

In the debate about moral testimony, those who have held that moral deference is problematic have typically thought that the problem is either epistemic or moral. The most commonly defended view is that moral deference is *morally* problematic because it impairs moral understanding and leads to actions that lack moral worth. In this paper I showed, first, that the relevant kind of moral deference is a more complicated phenomenon than typically suggested. I then argued that even if the moral understanding explanation identifies *something* problematic about moral deference, such deference is problematic aside from these moral concerns (and also aside from the worry that moral testimony might be epistemically problematic, because it cannot transfer moral knowledge).

The further problem with moral deference stems from (i) the connection between moral judgements and moral sentiments and (ii) our inability to modify moral sentiments on the basis of pure, direct, deference. How exactly this pans out depends on the metaethical background. If some kind of non-cognitivism or hybrid theory is true then moral deference is, at best, very difficult and, at worst, impossible. If a form of sentimentalist realism is true, then moral deference will lead one into an lack of coherence between one's sentiments and the sentiments that one judges to be fitting. Finally, I showed how this kind of explanation can be applied to forms of normative deference beyond the moral, such as aesthetic and prudential deference.

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